

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: May 29, 2023

From: Jackie Teed, Acting Director
Climate Action, Planning and Development
File: 13.2630.10

Item #: 2023-348

Subject: Welcome Centre Update and Funding Request

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to renew the contract for the Community Navigator position at the Welcome Centre for 2024, 2025 and 2026. The contract would be for three years and would comply with the following conditions:

- be for a maximum of \$75,000 for each of 2024, 2025 and 2026
- have to abide by the City's Living Wage Policy;
- have to provide a minimum of 35 hours of coverage per week; and,
- have to be able to cover some non-school hours.

THAT the City's contribution to the Welcome Centre for 2024, 2025 and 2026 be brought forward with the 2024-2028 Five-Year Financial Plan and considered with all other future service enhancements and City-wide priorities.

THAT the City continue to apply to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and other federal and provincial agencies to offset all or some of the costs related to this position.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is twofold: (1) to provide an update to Council regarding the Welcome Centre; and, (2) to recommend continued City funding for the Community Navigator position for the Welcome Centre for 2024, 2025 and 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Welcome Centre, one of two community hubs that form the Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC) space at New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS), opened its doors to the community in September 2021. The City is funding a Community Navigator position who works a minimum of 35 hours per week, with this funding in place for 2021, 2022 and 2023. The City is also funding a subsidized access program for the Welcome Centre to the end of 2023.

Since 2010, New Westminster has experienced increasing immigration and the community has become more diverse. For recent immigrants and refugees, navigating available services, including ones that serve but are not located in New Westminster, is challenging. The Welcome Centre is successfully addressing these and other issues, while enabling settlement organizations to better collaborate and coordinate their services.

The Community Navigator position plays a central role in the success of the Welcome Centre. As a key resource, this position assists newcomer families and individuals by connecting them to resources in the community and helping them to navigate services and supports with the ultimate goal of fostering connection and belonging.

BACKGROUND

The Welcome Centre, one of two community hubs that form the Neighbourhood Learning Centre space (NLC) at New Westminster Secondary School (NWSS), opened its doors to the community in September 2021. It comprises 2,500 square feet, includes a reception area, a resource library, flex offices and multi-purpose spaces, as well as facilitating access to classrooms outside of school hours. The Welcome Centre is supported through a School District clerical position, which assists with student registration with a focus on newcomer families, and is utilized by the Settlement Workers in the Schools and staff from the Adult Education program.

The Welcome Centre also houses an office of the Qayqayt First Nation, and offers flex office, multi-purpose and classroom spaces to settlement organizations on a non-profit lease or rental basis. The City is funding a Community Navigator position who works a minimum of 35 hours per week, with this funding in place for 2021, 2022 and 2023. The City is also funding a subsidized access program for the Welcome Centre. The subsidized access program supports cultural and ethnic groups and organizations to access and utilize this space if they are not able to pay the non-profit rental rate.

POLICY CONTEXT

The Welcome Centre and the Community Navigator position are highly supportive of Council's *2023-2026 Strategic Priorities Plan*, with particular applicability to Community Belonging and Connecting. Both also achieve all four objectives and will be instrumental in realizing the related four outcomes. More specifically, the centre serves Indigenous peoples, recent immigrants, refugees and temporary residents, and the position assists these populations to access essential information; to connect with services and

supports; to feel part of the community; and to more quickly integrate and settle in New Westminster. This is the only resource which specifically addresses the needs of newcomers, which, given the city's increasing diversity and multiculturalism, addresses an important need both now and into the future. For more information on the policy context, please refer to attachment #1.

ANALYSIS

Increasing Immigration and Diversity

Immigration is a significant driver of population growth in New Westminster. Between 2016 and 2021, increases to the immigrant population comprised 63.8% of total population growth.

In 2021, 37.5% of the city's population was comprised of immigrants. By comparison, in 2016, it was 34.3%. In 2021, the top five source countries for recent immigrants were India (15.8%), China (10.7%), Philippines (8.8%), Brazil (7.6%) and Eritrea (7.0%). Between 2016 and 2021, 760 refugees settled in New Westminster, or 5.9% of refugee claimants to Metro Vancouver. According to Immigrant Services Society of BC, between January 1, 2021 and November 15, 2022, 65 refugees settled in New Westminster, most from Afghanistan. New Westminster has also received displaced Ukrainians since the onset of the war. While data is not available at the municipal level, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, since the start of 2022, more than 132,000 Ukrainian nationals have entered Canada, with the provincial government saying more than 11,000 have settled in BC.

Settlement and Integration Issues and Need for a Welcome Centre

Based on the *New Westminster Immigrant and Refugee Survey Report and Action Plan* (2014), which involved 224 respondents, recent immigrants and refugees face a number of settlement and integration challenges, including locating or securing:

- employment and training (70%);
- housing (53%);
- doctor or dentist (40%);
- information about available services (39%);
- child care (30%);
- English language services (10%); and,
- schooling for their children (10%).¹

This document identified a major service gap as a Welcome Centre to offer centralized information, meeting and program spaces, and referral services.

¹ In most cases, respondents identified more than one challenge, thus the percentages do not add up to 100%.

DISCUSSION

Welcome Centre – Role and Successes

New Westminster has experienced increasing immigration and the community has become more diverse. For recent immigrants and refugees, navigating available services, including ones that serve but are not located in New Westminster, is challenging. The Welcome Centre is successfully addressing these and other issues, while enabling settlement organizations to better collaborate and coordinate their services, including by:

- Facilitating connectedness, integration and social inclusion for Indigenous persons, recent immigrants, refugees and temporary residents.
- Creating a welcoming, inclusive and safe place for newcomers to New Westminster.
- Providing one-stop access to information and referral to a range of services to meet the diverse needs of newcomers.
- Providing opportunities for newcomers to learn about their new community and positively interact with service providers.
- Providing opportunities for social interaction, relationship building and involvement in all facets of community life.
- Hosting the annual Intercultural Festival and Information Fair.
- Facilitating service coordination and collaboration, as well as networking opportunities.

Between October 2021 and December 2022, the Welcome Centre hosted 48 workshops accounting for 470 hours and involving 627 participants. This does not include the support provided to community members on a daily basis through drop-ins and referrals. In July and August 2022, the Welcome Centre hosted a day camp for Ukrainian students that ran five days per week.

Community Navigator Position – Role and Successes

The Community Navigator position plays a central role in the success of the Welcome Centre. As a key resource, the Community Navigator assists newcomer families and individuals by connecting them to resources in the community and helping them navigate services and supports with the ultimate goal of fostering connection and belonging, including by:

- Meeting with settlement agencies and other organizations to identify trends, as well as gaps in services facing newcomers.

- Facilitating social clubs to reduce social isolation and provide connection and belonging.
- Connecting newcomers with various services, including but not limited to child care, education, employment, language and recreation programs, as well as local events and festivities.
- Organizing programs and workshops on subjects, including but not limited to anti-racism, child care, early years parenting, employment training, language learning, social connections, and tutoring.
- Ensuring that there is follow-up after initial contact with newcomers through a monthly e-mail newsletter.
- Working in collaboration with other service providers and community partners to ensure effective access to newcomer services and supports.
- Facilitating with community organizations and cultural/ethnic groups to deliver programming in the Welcome Center, thus creating a hub of activity.
- Promoting understanding and embracing of cultural differences and local Indigenous history.
- Planning and hosting the annual Intercultural Festival and Information Fair.
- Communicating issues related barriers and needs for newcomers to the City, the School District and the WINS Local Immigration Partnership Council and assisting in removing these barriers.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The capital costs related to the construction of the Welcome Centre were funded through the Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC) Program with the School District covering the ongoing maintenance costs and the majority of the operating costs, including a School District clerical position, which assists with student registration with a focus on newcomer families.

The City has committed funding to the Community Navigator position for the following years: 2021, 2022 and 2023. As cited, this position focuses on addressing community inquiries and facilitating belonging and connecting for newcomers.

For 2024 and beyond, staff will bring forward with the 2024-2028 Five-Year Financial Plan, the request to continue with funding the Community Navigator position, approximately \$75,000/year. Staff will only be requesting a three-year temporary grant of \$225,000 and work with the City's Financial Services Department on a recommended funding source for Council to consider with all other future service enhancements and City-wide priorities.

The City, with the support of the Welcoming and Inclusive New Westminster (WINS) Local Immigration Partnership Council, submitted a proposal to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), requesting funding for the Community Navigator position for 2024, 2025 and 2026. IRCC has informed the City that the proposal was not successful for funding in 2024 but that a new funding request could be submitted in 2024 for consideration of funding in 2025 and 2026. If successful, any funds received from IRCC would offset some or all of the City's contribution. The City will also apply to other federal and provincial agencies, and foundations, with regard to offsetting the City's contribution

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council direct staff to renew the contract for the Community Navigator position at the Welcome Centre for 2024, 2025 and 2026. The contract would be for three years and would comply with the following conditions::
 - be for a maximum of \$75,000 for each of 2024, 2025 and 2026;
 - have to abide by the City's Living Wage Policy;
 - have to provide a minimum of 35 hours of coverage per week; and,
 - have to be able to cover some non-school hours.
2. That the City's contribution to the Welcome Centre for 2024, 2025 and 2026 be brought forward with the 2024-2028 Five-Year Financial Plan and considered with all other future service enhancements and City-wide priorities..
3. That the City continue to apply to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and other federal and provincial agencies to offset all or some of the costs related to this position.
4. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends Options 1, 2 and 3.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Policy Context

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

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This report was reviewed by:

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This report was approved by:

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